

I think they'll be thrilled by cali-chan (girls_are_weird)

Series: Mike, Eleven, and the quiet moments [5]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Big Brother!Steve, Dad!Steve, F/M, I don't even know what to tag this, I really REALLY love this one, IT'S JUST CUTE I'LL GO WITH CUTE, It's not really angst, It's probably not kosher of me to say this but, Mom!Steve?, Protective Dad!Hopper, also actual mother Karen Wheeler, but it's not really fluffy either, even if it's going to get jossed quicker than you can blink, or whatever you wanna call him

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Summary:

"Don't you think you've been spending a little too much time with that... girl?" Spring Break 1986. Mike just wants to take Eleven to the movies, but Karen has... reservations. Mike/Eleven, post-S2. Hopefully post-S3? Spoilers. PG-13 because Steve.

I think they'll be thrilled

Author's Note:

It's probably not kosher of me to say this, but I really, *really* love this one. Even if it's going to get jossed quicker than you can blink.

"I'm going to the movies with El, I'll be back later!"

All Karen really saw was a blur of blue and khaki make its way from the stairs to the front door in a fraction of a second. It was only when she heard the exclamation that she realized the blur was actually her only son, but that was enough to get her to spring into action. "Hey, hey, hey! Michael, come here for a second before you go!"

She heard him groan and then saw him stomp his way to where she was sitting at the dining table, cross-referencing phone numbers for their church's volunteer day. "Mom, I'm gonna be late! I still have to bike all the way to the Police station to pick El up and that gives us *just enough time* to get to The Hawk before the movie starts."

"Well, then you should've left earlier," Karen retorted in an often-used "Mom" tone, hoping that would spare her the whining. It did, for the moment, but she saw him roll his eyes either way. "Will you be back for dinner?"

"I don't think so," he admitted in a mumble. "I think we'll just go to Pizza One or something," he added with a disinterested shrug. "You don't have to save me food."

Karen sighed. "That's the third time this week that you haven't been home for dinner, Michael," she pointed out, somewhat disappointed. When her kids first started spending more time away from home than in it, she'd actually seen it as an opportunity to do some of the things *she* loved rather than having her whole life revolve around her children.

But recently, with Nancy spending nearly all her free time with her

boyfriend and Mike's group of little friends choosing to spend more time elsewhere than in her basement like they used to, she had to admit even all the me-time in the world didn't stop her from feeling like her house had turned into a ghost town. She loved Ted, she really did, but he always got home late and when he was home, he was always either watching/reading the news or asleep on the La-Z-Boy. Needless to say, spending the bulk of her day with only a five-year-old for company wasn't exactly conducive to meaningful, satisfying adult conversation. She could admit to herself that she was lonely— and her children not being around made her feel it more acutely.

Plus, she also had... other reservations. "Don't you think you've been spending a little too much time with that... girl?"

She knew he wouldn't appreciate the question, but she had to ask. He'd grown out of his rebellious phase rather quickly the previous year, stopped skipping class and talking back to teachers and generally misbehaving in school in what felt like the blink of an eye. He didn't sleep down in the basement anymore, and the last time Karen suggested he take down that blanket fort he had set up down there, he didn't scream at her like he had more than once before.

He'd gone back to the happy child he'd been before the still-baffling events of the Fall of '83, playing tabletop games and reading comics and playing videogames with his friends like nothing had changed, but Karen hadn't forgotten how quickly her boy's mood had taken a turn that year, how he had sunk into what she could only think of as a deep depression for almost a year, for little to no apparent reason.

But then on his first year of high school, Jim Hopper had suddenly shown up in town with a newfound daughter, and it made Karen nervous because of the way Mike's behavior shifted once again so abruptly. Oh, he still hung out with his friends, he was still doing well in school and she'd received no disciplinary calls of any kind that year so far, but the girl seemed to always be at the forefront of her son's mind. It was always "El this," or "El that" (she wasn't sure where the nickname came from, since as far as she knew the girl's name was Jane); no matter what the conversation was about it always led back to that girl, and she worried this infatuation could

bring on another negative change in him.

Initially he just frowned at her in that way he often did when he thought she or Ted were being deliberately obtuse. "So? It's Easter break," he said, as if it were a foregone conclusion that having no school meant it was mandatory for him to spend his time day-in and day-out with Jane.

She shook her head, looking down at the papers she was working on and rearranging a couple of them into their correct order. "I'm just saying, it wouldn't be terrible to just step back a little. You don't have to spend every waking hour with this girl, you know."

"No."

The tone of his voice was different—harder—and she looked up to see him outright glaring at her. He'd clearly caught on to what she was subtly trying to say. She sighed. "Michael—"

"No," he repeated. "I won't stop seeing El. You can't make me. I've done *nothing* wrong." It wasn't the whine she'd been expecting when she started this conversation; it was a declaration. An affirmation.

She shook her head, putting her pen down on the table, on top of the papers. "I'm not going to make you stop seeing her, I just think you shouldn't be spending so much time at her house—"

"Yeah, along with *all my friends*—"

"And it's all the way out in the middle of nowhere, too. How am I supposed to know if something happens to you—"

"It's the *Chief of Police's* house—"

"And I just think that you're getting too serious about her, too fast. I mean, goodness, she just appeared one day. Sure, she's Hopper's daughter, but we don't even really know where she came from," she pointed out. It wasn't that she had anything against the girl; Karen was sure she was probably perfectly nice, and God knew poor Jim Hopper deserved a second try at parenthood after what happened to

his other daughter, but the whole situation was just so... *strange*.

The scowl her son was sending her way was one for the ages. "What does that matter? Where she comes from or what she did before doesn't change the way I feel about her."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "'The way you feel about her'?" Somehow those six words were well on their way to confirming her worst suspicions about her son's infatuation with this girl. "See, this is exactly what I mean. Look, I know you like her and that probably feels like a really big deal right now, but you are entirely too young —"

"Mom, *it doesn't matter*." He took a deep breath— like he was winded, like he had just run a marathon or something— and then looked her straight in the eye. He didn't even blink. "*I love her.*"

Now Karen was the one who felt winded— like she'd been punched in the stomach, really. It was easy to just wave this whole situation off when Ted put it in terms of "Oh, he's just a teenager in love, the crush will pass soon enough," but it was hard to dismiss the depth of his feelings when he was telling her right to her face. His gaze didn't waver and his voice didn't falter, and whatever else might be a factor, she could tell that he absolutely *believed* himself to be in love with Hopper's girl, at least.

It had been bad enough when Nancy started having sex at sixteen. Even then, she hadn't actually made any mention of love until quite a few months into her relationship with Steve. Now Nancy was eighteen, and Karen knew that she had a life of her own apart from her family, plans and dreams with Jonathan that Karen wasn't privy to, and she had learned the hard way that there wasn't much she could do about it. Her daughter was an adult, and despite everything, Karen knew she had a good head on her shoulders. She trusted her to make good decisions in the end, so there was nothing to do but accept it and try to be there for her as much as she could.

Michael was a smart kid, too, but he'd always been more driven by his emotions. He felt everything so strongly and so deeply. She didn't want him to go down that same road Nancy had, but at an even

younger age. She was at a loss. Was there anything she could do to slow this down without completely alienating her only son?

She pinched the bridge of her nose with two fingers, already feeling the beginnings of a headache coming on. "Michael, you are fifteen years old—"

"I know how old I am!" he snapped, his patience finally reaching a breaking point. "It doesn't make a difference. You don't know what we've been through—"

"So, tell me!" Karen stood up so she could look him eye-to-eye. He'd shot up like a weed over the summer and now he was taller than her, and it only reinforced the idea that he wasn't her little boy anymore. "You can talk to me. If this girl is important to you, then I want to know why she's so special. And maybe I could give you some advice —"

"I don't *need* advice," Mike shook his head emphatically. "I love El, and I won't be separated from her. Period." He glared at her again, and Karen could tell from the obstinate set of his jaw that she had lost this argument before she even started it. "It's not gonna happen again."

"Michael—"

"I'm already late," he cut her off abruptly, taking a couple of steps back and out of the dining room. "I'm just gonna go," he finished in a mumble, spinning on his heels and heading toward the front door.

"Michael? Michael!" She tried to call him back, but the only response was the sound of the front door slamming closed so hard that the window shutters rattled.

Shaking her head, she sat back down at the table processing what had just happened. The entire argument had spiraled out of her hands pretty much from the get-go, but one thing in particular stood out to her at first thought:

...It's not going to happen again?

"I'm just sayin', kids don't just appear outta the blue. You sure there's nothing nefarious goin' on here, Jimmy?"

Hopper closed his eyes and took a deep breath, wondering for the thousandth time why he'd ever decided that moving back to Hawkins to "protect and serve" and secretly save the asses of this sorry bunch of ingrates was a good idea. "Mort, we've been through this. She's my daughter."

Granted, he was aware that just popping up at work one day with a teenager in tow and nothing more than "This is Jane, she's my daughter, she's going to be living with me from now on, and that's all you need to know" as an explanation was probably not the wisest thing he'd ever done, but frankly, he wasn't in the mood to come up with an intricate cover story that day—and still wasn't. As far as he was concerned, adding more details just invited people to ask more questions.

And for the most part, this tactic had worked. Most people just accepted Hopper's sudden progeny with only some slight surprise. Others were curious but were too intimidated by him to bother asking. The rest got some entertainment from speculating amongst themselves—last he'd heard through the grapevine, he'd slept with some woman in the city during his bachelor party many years ago, knocked her up but didn't know about it, and fifteen years later the woman had managed to find him and dumped the kid on him. Whatever. As long as no one bothered El with that crap, he didn't give a rat's ass what they thought.

Then there were a couple crazies like Mortimer Frings here—retired after a lifetime of working in the factories, growing senile, and bored enough to stop by the Police station every other day to "supervise" that "the coppers" were actually doing their job—who simply would not take no for an answer. And why did he have to pop in just as he'd

told Flo to go arrange files in the back?

The old man narrowed his eyes at Jim through his thick glasses. "So you've said, but then I think, see," he wagged a finger at Hopper, "that's also what them child traffickers would say to cover up their tracks. They're everywhere now, don't you know, Jimmy, and they're all sneaky-like."

Ignoring Jim's frustrated huff of "Jesus, Mort" (or maybe he just didn't catch it because of his hearing problems), the retiree continued. "You're going to have to give me more than that, Jimmy, or I may have to call the police on you."

Hopper ran a hand over his face. "Mort, for the last time, I *am* the police." Luckily for him, before he gave into the urge to strangle the insufferable old man, he heard the door to the station open with a clang and soon Mike Wheeler was rounding the corner.

"Hi, Chief," the boy asked as he walked up to Flo's desk, where Jim had been standing, drinking his coffee, before he'd been ambushed by Mort. "Is El ready?" He was practically bouncing on the balls of his feet in excitement, and it reminded Hopper of the way his own daughter had been just that morning.

El had been talking about a movie she wanted to see— something about a girl and pink, whatever that was about— for nearly a month. None of her little gang of friends was particularly enthused to go with her (even the redhead said it was "too girly" for her), so for a while there, she had resigned herself to maybe catching it on video later on.

But then the Wheeler boy (who would find a way to pull the moon down from the sky if El asked him to, Hopper was sure of that) offered to go with her. He'd saved up his allowance for an entire month, his daughter had informed him with a proud smile, and he was going to take her to the movies and then to dinner, just the two of them. Tonight.

Oh, joy, the thought reverberated in Jim's mind as he looked at the kid, who was not-quite-patiently waiting for his answer.

Hopper stared him down for a second longer, just for effect, before

relenting with a sigh. "She's in the back, helping Flo organize the file cabinets."

The boy was off before he had even finished the sentence. "Hey, hey! Wheeler!" Jim called out, and the kid halted right away, turning back to listen to what he had to say. Hopper pointed straight at him, his expression stone cold. "Hands to yourself."

The kid's eyes widened for a second, but then his expression turned into a scowl—that "adults are so stupid" scowl Hopper had been on the receiving end of several times through his acquaintance with Michael Wheeler. "We'll be at the movie theater," he pointed out. "What do you think I'm going to do?"

"Uh huh," Jim retorted, deadpan. He'd been the Chief of Police in this godforsaken town long enough to know better than most how kids liked getting fresh at the movies—heck, he'd *been* one of those kids who liked getting fresh at the movies. Wheeler wasn't getting out of this lecture. "Hands. To. Yourself," he repeated sternly, throwing in a glare for good measure.

The little twerp rolled his eyes at him, but at least he gave in. "Fine, sure," he said, and when Hopper finally nodded at him to go, he ran toward the back of the station like he couldn't wait a second longer.

Jim had barely taken a sip of his coffee when the pair returned, hurrying toward the main entrance. "Bye, Chief!" the boy quickly let out as they passed by, with El giving him a small wave as he pulled her by the hand on their way to the door.

"I'll pick you kids up at the pizza place at 8 sharp!" he managed to get in just before the door closed behind them. He waited until the clang-ing of the door stopped, then ran a hand over his face. "Jesus. How did I become such a *Dad*?"

"That's exactly what I've been askin', Jimmy."

He turned to Mortimer, who he'd completely forgotten about, but who was still standing by Flo's desk, eager to either drag a sordid criminal confession out of him, or annoy him into an early grave. Hopper sighed. "Just... go home, Mort." Shaking his head, he picked

up his coffee cup and walked back to his office, leaving the old man there for Flo to deal with.

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"No, I said two sausage and pepperoni, one pepperoni, and one pepperoni with extra cheese."

The teenager behind the counter— who obviously could not care less — nodded without lifting his gaze from the pad he was writing on. "Sausage and pepperoni. Right." He ripped out the sheet with the order details so he could take it to the kitchen. "I'll let you know when your order's ready." He took the \$20 Steve had slapped on the table and cashed it before disappearing behind the back door. Steve figured he'd have to wait around nearby, because the dude hadn't even looked at him the entire time he was taking his order, so how would he know whose pies those were?

He sighed. His parents were vacationing in Europe, and he could've just as easily spent his Spring Break on a beach somewhere, but instead he chose to drive up from Evansville back to his hometown to hang out with a bunch of 15-year-olds.

He *really* needed to re-examine his life choices.

He was looking around for a place to sit while he waited— the place was fairly empty, as it was still a little early for the dinner crowd— when his eyes caught an unexpected sight: Mike and Eleven sitting by themselves at a booth, sharing what looked like an extra-cheesy pizza, no pun intended.

They were sitting side by side on a booth, their backs to the counter, and they were talking animatedly in-between bites. They were also holding hands atop the table, which seemed to be giving Mike a little bit of trouble as it meant he had to eat with his left hand, but then again, he wasn't letting go either. It was all so stinkin' cute that Steve thought it might give him cavities, and so he couldn't resist going over and teasing them a little.

"Well, well, well," he said as he walked up to the booth and leaned against the backrest of the seat opposite the two. "If it isn't little Miss Hopper and the least cutest out of the Wheeler siblings." Eleven gave him a small wave, and Mike glared at him. "So... whatcha doin'?"

"Eating," the boy retorted straight away in that "what, are you *blind*?" tone he was so good at.

Steve rolled his eyes. "Yes, I can see that. What I meant was why are you here on your own while all your other little friends are over at my place pretending the *Nightmare on Elm Street* sequel isn't scaring the shit out of them."

"We saw a movie, too," Eleven said, in that quiet-but-straightforward way Steve had come to expect from her through the last year. Then she turned to Mike. "I'm going to wash my hands," she let him know, and pushed herself out of the booth.

As she walked off to the bathroom, a thought occurred to Steve. "Wait, wait. You didn't tell Hopper that you'd be at my place, did you? 'Cause if he knocks down my door trying to protect his daughter's virtue, I have no qualms about throwing you under the bus —"

"What? No!" Mike interrupted him with a grimace. "He knows where we are, he's coming to pick us up later." He frowned. "Why does everyone think I'm going to do, like... *stuff* with El?" The frown remained but his cheeks flushed, as if his face couldn't decide whether to be embarrassed or angry.

Steve could've laughed at the question, but he didn't think that would go well with the kid. "Uh, because that's what I would do?" he offered with a dismissive wave of his head. "I mean, you know that your sister was just a couple years older than you when we started—"

Mike recoiled so fast, it was almost comical. "Eww! Shut up! I don't want to hear this!" he said as his hands lifted up as if to cover his ears.

Steve scoffed. "I was going to say 'dating,' dumbass." He shook his head. "Just saying, we were your age once, too. I know what that

shit's like."

The boy scowled at him. "Well, I'm not like you."

Steve thought about that one for a moment and couldn't dispute that. "Yeah, you got a point," he admitted. Mike Wheeler was nothing like him at all. None of those kids were, really. Perhaps that's why he liked the little shitheads so much.

He dropped himself down on the booth he'd been leaning against. "So. You're surlier than usual," he pointed out, getting an eyeroll in response. "What's up?"

"Other than you interrupting my date, you mean?" Mike retorted with a pointed stare, resting his face against a propped-up hand, like he couldn't wait for Steve to just go *away*.

"You're sitting here holding hands and eating pizza. Hardly like I walked in on some earth-shattering moment," he threw back, reaching out for the last slice of pizza that was still left over in front of Mike. He was hungry and those idiots in the kitchen were taking their sweet time with his order; why let a perfectly good, extra-cheesy slice go to waste?

The kid looked for a second like he wanted to object, but Steve was already taking a bite out of the pizza by that point so he didn't really get much of a say in the matter. "Seriously, though, what's got your panties in a twist today?"

"I don't—" he started to reply, but that was when Eleven came back from the bathroom. She sat back down beside Mike with a smile. Then she looked at Steve—or more specifically, at the slice of pizza Steve was currently eating—before turning to look questioningly at Mike. And then back at Steve again.

The boy sighed. "Say, Steve..." he started, somewhat unsure. He paused for a moment, as if organizing his thoughts, then continued. "My mom liked you, right? When you were dating Nancy, I mean." He looked down at the table, his brows furrowed, but this time the frown was more pensive than offended. "She seems to like Jonathan, too..."

Steve swallowed his food, trying not to think too deeply about that comment. He hadn't seen Nancy since he got back to Hawkins. He'd seen Jonathan in passing, when he went to the store he worked at to buy some stuff. Greeted him from half an aisle away. He was trying to be mature about things, trying to not dwell on a relationship that was over and done with— it was easier when he was out of town—but he'd be lying if he said it didn't still sting a little. First love and all that crap; even guys like Steve had to deal with it. He figured he'd always care about Nancy in some way, and the fact that Jonathan was a good guy didn't really help matters.

But this wasn't the time to be thinking about any of that. "Yeah. So?" he replied to Mike's question before popping the last bite of pizza crust into his mouth.

"It's just..." The boy started picking at a splinter on the table. "I guess..." Eleven was gazing at him out of the corner of her eyes, her features settling into a somewhat concerned expression. "Just... how do you get my mom to like you?" Mike finally spit out, and Steve had to admit he hadn't been expecting that question.

He looked between the two, a little confused. As far as he knew, Mrs. Wheeler wasn't the type to dislike her own son, so he figured this had to be about... "Your mom doesn't like Eleven?" He found this really puzzling. Like the boy had pointed out, Karen Wheeler had liked Steve just fine, and Steve came with a reputation that he didn't figure many parents would be happy with. Also, he didn't figure Jonathan was much of a conversationalist during family dinners, but according to Mike, his mother liked him, too. Why wouldn't she like Eleven? The girl was as cute as a button.

Case in point, as he asked that question, Eleven had looked so dejected that it almost made Steve want to give her a hug. Almost. "Yeah, but I don't know why," Mike explained, reaching out to squeeze Eleven's hand, as if to give her some measure of comfort. "She seems okay whenever Eleven comes over with the others. She never said anything before, but then today she started going on about how I'm never home, and I'm hanging out with El too much, and that we should spend some time apart and..." The boy sighed. "I don't know."

Steve pondered the situation. "That's weird. Who knows, maybe it's different with your girlfriends because you're her only son?" he threw out as an option. "Or maybe..." Another option crossed his mind just then. "I mean, Nancy's leaving for college soon, right?" He'd heard from friends that she and Jonathan were thinking of going to school in New York. He didn't know how accurate that was, but either way, Nancy was probably leaving Hawkins sometime in the summer.

Mike nodded, confirming his assertion. "Well, with Nancy moving out and you spending all your time with Eleven, your mom's probably feeling a bit like she's losing her children."

The boy frowned again. "But I still live with her."

"Yeah, but it's not about where you *are*," Steve pointed out smartly. "It's about the fact that her babies are growing up and they don't need her anymore. Eleven here is just a symptom of that," he finished with a flourish in the girl's direction. Her eyes widened.

Steve could see from Mike's expression the exact moment his explanation clicked. Damn, he was good. Maybe he should declare as a psychology major next semester.

(Nah, too much reading).

"So, what do we do?" the boy finally asked. "'Cause I'm not gonna stop hanging out with El. That is *not* an option," he declared impassionedly with a sharp shake of his head. His hand tightened around Eleven's, who nodded in agreement.

Steve waved that idea off straight away. "No, of course not," he scoffed. He'd been around this bunch of little bastards enough last year that he was aware splitting those two up was an utterly ridiculous suggestion. Normally he'd be the first to advice these kids to just enjoy their youth and stay away from serious relationships for as long as possible, but Mike and Eleven were different. Even he could see that.

But then again, he thought they could afford to cut Mrs. Wheeler some slack, too. She was a good mother, and several times through the year he dated Nancy, he had found himself wishing his parents

cared about him even half as much as Mrs. Wheeler obviously cared about her children. Not that he would ever tell anyone that, of course.

He leaned back against the back rest of the booth, crossing his arms. "I think... what you have to do is show your mother that she's not losing her son, but rather she's gaining a daughter," he declared dramatically.

Mike's entire face scrunched up. "Seriously? We're fifteen, it's not like we're getting married!"

Now, Steve would bet his car that he'd be invited to their wedding at some point in the not-too-distant future, and the flush in the boy's cheeks told him he'd absolutely win that bet. But that was a conversation for another day—and another person. "Relax, I'm just teasing," he waved off Mike's indignation with a shrug. "Honestly, your mom's easy, really. Just turn up the charm a little and she'll come around."

The two kids gave him blank looks, and for a moment Steve wondered if he'd spoken in Chinese or something. He knew from the other twerps that Eleven sometimes still had trouble understanding certain words because of the way she grew up, but Mike Wheeler didn't have a kept-in-a-lab-for-twelve-years excuse to fall back to, and yet he seemed to be just as clueless as the girl.

And then he remembered—that's right, these kids were nerds. No wonder they knew nothing about charm, then.

"Just include her a little more," Steve elaborated a bit for their sake. "Spend some more time at your house, instead of going out," he told Mike, specifically. "Be extra nice to her. Answer her questions, strike up a conversation every once in a while, if you can." That bit of wisdom was more directed toward Eleven. "Offer to help her do the dishes, that sort of stuff. Maybe give her a small present now and then. Nothing huge, just a small detail that makes her feel like she's still important to you."

The kids thought about it for a minute or so, but then Mike nodded. "Thanks, Steve. That's actually helpful!"

Steve rolled his eyes. "You don't have to sound so shocked about it," he grumbled under his breath, but it was good-natured. Then he caught sight of the counter, which had been empty for a few minutes, and groaned. "Seriously, what the hell is taking them so long? Are they milking a cow to get the milk for the cheese or what?" He got up off the booth with a huff. "I'm gonna go see what's up with my food. Have a nice date, kids." As he walked away he saw Eleven's eyes widen and saw her turn to excitedly tell Mike something, but he didn't stick around to hear what it was.

He finally managed to flag down the disinterested teenager who had taken his order earlier and he— once again without even once bothering to look straight at his face— told him his order was going to take just a couple more minutes. (Yeah, right).

He decided to keep the pressure up so he remained close by, leaning back against a wall beside a plastic potted fern which was directly behind the booth Mike and Eleven were sitting at. (No one could make a plastic potted fern look cooler than Steve Harrington, naturally). He didn't want to butt in on the kids' date again so he tried to stay out of sight, but he was still close enough that he could hear them speaking to each other in low tones.

"I'm sorry," the boy started, sounding disheartened. "I know it's like Steve said and this whole thing is not really about you, but it still sucks."

"It's not your fault," Eleven assured him, emphatic. Of course, Steve hadn't expected her to resent Mike for any of it; she looked at him like the sun shone out of his ass. It was disgustingly sweet, really.

"I know," Mike retorted, resigned. "It's just..." He sighed. "I wish I could tell her how amazing you really are. I mean, she knows you're pretty and you're nice and you're smart, but that could be any girl, you know? Because I can never tell Mom about... *everything*. All the stuff that's happened to us."

He paused for a couple of seconds, then spoke again. "I can't tell her... how good you are, even though you grew up in that horrible place. I can't tell her how strong you are, and I don't mean just your powers. You've been through so much shit, and you survived." There was a

murmur and Steve wondered if Eleven had said something he didn't catch, but Mike continued speaking. "And I can't tell her how brave you are... how much you've sacrificed to save all of us. Save me."

"You saved me, too," Eleven told him.

He scoffed. "No, I haven't."

"Yes, Mike," the girl reiterated, the words so resolute, it really left no room for doubt. "You... you took me out of the rain, and you made me warm. You hid me from the bad men, and you taught me so many things. You taught me what a friend was."

It was odd for Steve to hear about that week directly from them. He still didn't know most of that story. He'd heard the gist of it from Nancy—that her brother had been hiding a psychokinetic little girl in their basement for a week, and then that psychokinetic little girl saved them all from the monster they'd fought at Jonathan's place—but he didn't know the details. Now he understood a little bit better how these two bonded so quickly.

There was a quick series of blunt sounds, like one of them was rearranging their position on the booth. "You never gave up on me, and when I was hiding, and I felt alone and angry, I would look for you, and it hurt that I couldn't talk to you but it also made me stronger. I had to be strong because I wanted to see you again."

Mike tried to interject. "That's—"

She continued speaking as if he hadn't said a thing. "You believe in me more than anyone. And you help me in school, and you walk with me to class so the mouthbreathers don't bother me, and you make me feel like I can breathe again when everything around is just... too much." There was some more shuffling around. "Of course you saved me. Mike, you save me *every day* just being by my side."

"El, I..."

There was silence again, and Steve kind of assumed they were making out, or at least kissing—not just because that's what *he* would do, but also because he felt that's what anyone should be

doing after a conversation like that.

Luckily for him, he didn't have to dwell on it, as the inattentive pizza boy chose that exact moment to come out of the kitchen holding four pizza boxes. Steve made his way to the counter quickly, before the dude forgot those were his.

As he made his way out of the pizza place with the four boxes in his arms, he had to turn around to lean back on the door to get it open, and he just happened to catch sight of the two kids again.

They were still holding hands, their entwined appendages stretched out on the table in front of them. He could just see from that distance that Mike was rubbing his thumb over the back of Eleven's hand lightly. They were sitting much closer than they were before, sides flushed against each other, and she was resting her head on his shoulder, her eyes closed momentarily.

At the sound of the door opening, Mike looked up from their joined hands and caught Steve's eye. Steve nodded a goodbye, and the boy returned it in kind before resting his cheek against the top of Eleven's head.

Then the door closed between them and Steve went back to his car, for the first time in over a year allowing himself the thought that he hoped to have something like that, a love that pure, in his life someday.

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Karen was just finishing packing up the leftovers from dinner when she heard the sound of a car parking by the curb in front of the house. Figuring that would be Jim Hopper bringing Michael back from his date, she paid it no heed, assuming her son would just let himself in and run straight to his bedroom. He probably wasn't too happy with her at the moment.

That's probably why she was so surprised when she heard someone

clear their throat behind her. "Uh, Mom?"

She put the last Tupperware container in the bottom tray of the refrigerator and then straightened up, turning to look over the fridge door. She was surprised to not only find her son there, but also his little girlfriend, Jane. She was holding a small bouquet of flowers—nothing fancy, like roses or similar, but spring blossoms, colorful flowers like daisies, daffodils and peonies. Had Michael bought those for her? "Oh, hello, Jane."

"Hi, Mrs. Wheeler," the girl politely intoned back with a small, hopeful smile. She really was a very pretty girl, Karen mused. It was no wonder Michael had fallen for her so quickly.

She returned the smile with practiced ease as she pushed the fridge door closed. "Did you kids enjoy the movie?"

"Yes," Jane replied, with Michael echoing a "Yeah" a second later. Then they stood there staring at her, somewhat awkwardly, until her son none-too-subtly elbowed the girl forward. "Um, Mike wouldn't let me pay for... snacks," Jane started carefully, making Karen wonder where she was going with this. "So I had leftover. I thought these might look good. In your living room, I mean."

She extended the bouquet toward Karen, tentatively, and Karen would be lying if she said she wasn't touched. She knew where this was coming from, of course; Michael had to have told her something about their argument earlier—he'd been so angry when he walked out of the house—but she thought it was sweet that the girl was attempting to smooth things over with her.

"Oh. Thank you, Jane! What a lovely gesture." She smiled at her, this time genuinely. "I know exactly where I'm going to put it." She took the flowers from the girl's hands and made her way around the kitchen peninsula, crouching down by the lower cabinets under the sink where she kept her vases.

"Uh, Mom, El's gotta go, Chief Hopper's waiting outside," Michael pointed out as she browsed through the cabinets.

"Yes, of course." Karen didn't get up but smiled again at them from

her position. "Please say hi to the Chief for me. And thanks again for the flowers, they're beautiful."

"Bye," the girl said before Michael led her by the hand toward the door.

Karen kept an eye on the two as she rummaged around the cabinets for a vase that Ted's mother had given them once as an anniversary present. They were standing by the door, talking so quietly that Karen couldn't hear the words, but they hadn't let go of each other's hands. Jane nodded to something Michael had said, and then he leaned down and pressed a short kiss on her lips. Nothing scandalous — just an innocent peck, and even Karen had to admit it was all very cute.

He opened the door for her and she walked out. He waved at her as she went, or maybe he was waving at Hopper, but he stayed there leaning against the doorframe, watching her go, until Karen heard the sound of Hopper's car again, this time as it drove out of the cul-de-sac.

She figured Michael would just go up to his room then, so she didn't spare him another glance once she found the vase and moved to the sink to give it a quick rinse. He surprised her again. "Mom?"

She turned the water off and shook the excess droplets out of the vase before turning to him. "Yes?" She grabbed the bouquet and unwrapped it, carefully laying the flowers down on the countertop so she could arrange them in the vase one by one.

Her son didn't look angry, but he didn't exactly seem relaxed, either. "Um, I know that you think I'm too young to be in love," he started, "and I understand why you feel that way, but... I just wanted to let you know that..." He took a deep breath, then let it go. "El and I? We're not just playing, here. This is the real deal. So... I think you should start getting used to her being around."

He was as serious as a heart attack, and for a moment Karen felt like she was talking to a much older soul. It worried her a little, the level of maturity she could see behind his eyes, but at the same time it made her really proud. "I think... if you get to know her a little better,

"you'll love her, too," he finished, and after a pause, he turned on his heels and made his way toward the stairs.

"Michael?" she called out just as he hit the first step. He paused and looked at her over the banister, somewhat hesitant. She smiled at her brave, sweet boy. "Why don't you ask Jane and Chief Hopper to have dinner with us tomorrow?" she offered, extending the olive branch she knew her son needed.

The brilliant smile she got in return was more than enough to reassure her that she was doing the right thing. "Okay," he accepted, then rushed up the stairs, taking the steps two at a time.

Karen looked down at the flowers she had laid down on the counter. Perhaps the inclusion of Jane Hopper into their lives wouldn't be such a disruptive turning point. It couldn't be, she told herself, if she made her son this happy.

Author's Note:

...I just wanted to write Karen and Steve, so sue me. (Hopper basically writes himself by now). Also, sassy!Mike is my fave. The title comes from a line from *Pretty in Pink*, which opened in theaters in late February 1986 and, as I hinted in the story, was the movie El and Mike went to see.

One more quick plug: I uploaded another *Stranger Things* video to my vlog this past Friday, this time dealing with [my speculation for Season 3](#). Be sure to stop by and give it a watch if you're into that kinda stuff. Also, thanks to everybody who watched [my Season 2 review](#) and [subscribed to my channel!](#) Much appreciated.